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FM AMCONSUL DUBAI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0867
INFO RUCNIRA/IRAN COLLECTIVE
RUEHDE/AMCONSUL DUBAI 3824
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 DUBAI 003131

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 5/24/2031

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SUBJECT: JEWISH MP: NO CHANGE IN SITUATION FOR IRANIAN JEWS BUT
WORRIED ABOUT THE FUTURE

REF: DUBAI 52

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CLASSIFIED BY: Jillian L Burns, Acting Consul General, Dubai,
UAE.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

1.(S) Summary: Following his visa interview May 2 (clearance still pending), the member of the Iranian parliament in the designated Jewish seat, Morris Motamed (please protect), discussed the current situation for Jews in Iran. He reported no change in their situation to date, but he is concerned this could change in the future and asked how the US would respond. He recommended no change to US policy towards Iran but worried about the impact of sanctions. This meeting occurred prior to the press allegations that a new law in Iran would require religious minorities to wear identifying badges. Although PolEconChief has not been able to confirm directly with Motamed that the story is untrue, Motamed was quoted in the press denying it, and another representative of the Tehran Jewish community told PolEconChief it was false. End summary.

So Far No Change But Worried about Future

2.(S) Iranian Jewish Majlis member Morris Motamed (please protect) applied May 2 for a visa to meet with Iranian Jewish communities in the US, as he has done many times in the past. (Note: his visa clearance is still pending.) After his interview, he discussed the current situation for Jews in Iran with PolEconChief. He said that to date, there has been no change in the situation in Iran for Jews. Nonetheless, he is worried that with the current hardline government, there is the possibility of a deterioration.

3.(S) Motamed hears that people from all religious minorities are emigrating from Iran in greater numbers. In the past, when people asked him whether or not to stay in Iran, he discouraged them from leaving. However, he said, this is no longer the case. He is even considering immigrating himself at some point in the future.

Relationship with Government

4.(S) Motamed claimed that the government is generally responsive to his requests, though it was clear he had closer relations with the previous administration. He asserted that after he protested last year in the Majles - with the support of Majles Speaker Hadad-Adel - about anti-Semitic content in

broadcasting, incidences declined. Prior to Ahmadinejad's trip to the UN last year, he tried to convince the president to meet with Iranian Jews in the US. However, when Iranian Jewish groups were noncommittal about a meeting, Ahmadinejad took insult and indicated he would not agree to a meeting.

5.(S) Even before Ahmadinejad made his first statements about the Holocaust, Motamed sent the president a letter protesting an inflammatory article in the hardline Keyhan newspaper. After Ahmadinejad started making Holocaust denial statements, prominent Iranians, including former President Khatami and former Majlis Speaker Karroubi, joined him in condemnation. Motamed thinks that Ahmadinejad, under pressure, has since tempered his comments from Holocaust denial to something more caveated ("if true, then..."). In his assessment, the government is clearly becoming more militarized, and Ahmadinejad is not up to the job.

Advice to/Request of the US

6.(S) Motamed recommended no change to current US policy towards Iran. He was worried, however, about the potential impact of broad sanctions on Iran. Since the US controls most of Iran's borders now, he said, fewer smuggled goods would get in than in the case of Iraq before the war.

7.(S) He asked if there was any thinking about how the USG would react if conditions for Jews in Iran turned very bad quickly. PolEconChief responded that if there were indications of a coming large outflow of refugees from Iran, we would likely take immediate steps to accommodate and process them outside the country, as we had in the lead-up to the Iraq war. A situation where Jews were threatened inside Iran and could not leave the country would, of course, require more thought.

8.(S) Motamed made a more immediate request for speedier asylum processing in Vienna, saying some people were required to stay there four to six months - and even longer - at great hardship.

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Badge Story Denied

9.(S) This meeting with Motamed occurred prior to the allegations in the Canadian press that a new law in Iran would require religious minorities to wear identifying badges. Although PolEconChief has not been able to confirm directly with Motamed that the story was untrue, Motamed was quoted in the press as denying it. Furthermore, in a meeting this week, a representative of the Tehran Jewish community introduced to PolEconChief by Motamed called the report false. A notable Iranian political analyst and Tehran University political science professor told PolEconChief that such a law would be "impossible" in Iran, a view echoed by another contact.

Other Issues

10.(S) Motamed claimed Iranian Jews have no problem now traveling back and forth between Iran and Israel (though they do not travel directly), thanks in large part to his efforts (Ref). He said he is also helping people who left Iran in prior years with no travel documents get permission to visit Iran. He has no updates, however, on the cases of the eleven Jews missing since the 1990s, although he continues to seek information.

11.(S) Jews, as well as all minorities, are required to perform military service. While Jews can serve as officers during their mandatory service if they have a university degree, they cannot be career military officers.

Comment

12.(S) Motamed made clear he saw no current deterioration of the situation for Jews, but his request for advanced planning in case of a future change is worth considering. While we have not heard the government make any such threats, it is possible Iran could retaliate against its Jewish community in case of a foreign, particularly Israeli, military attack. Separately, it is in USG interest that Motamed's visa be issued as he serves as an important link between the Iranian Jewish community and the outside world.

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